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As floodwaters crest at a record level, Gurnee officials are looking to the state and federal governments for financial help to defray the cost of fighting the rising Des Plaines River.

Mayor Donald Rudny declared the village a disaster area Tuesday in the first step toward trying to get state financial aid for the multitude of flood-related costs, such as emergency personnel.

"It's in the governor's hands though. He has to make the declaration and then that opens up the possibility for federal funding," Rudny said. "We've already had great support from congressmen (Mark) Kirk and (Philip) Crane, and they have worked with our state representatives."

Rudny said he doesn't know how soon Gurnee will see the money.

"One of the things we have to do is we have to assess the damage," Rudny said. "The damage could be very extensive when you consider not just the village of Gurnee, but also the area south of us."

The river was expected to crest in the village at 12 feet about 7 p.m. Tuesday. That would top the previous high of 11.95 feet recorded in the 1986 flood, according to the National Weather Service.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich is scheduled to visit and tour the area at 11 a.m. today.

Since flooding began, the Illinois and Federal Emergency Management agencies have been cataloging damage and cost estimates. Those findings will be reported to the governor's office to estimate funding needed to help homes, businesses and municipalities clean up and recover, said U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, who visited Gurnee to assess the damage Tuesday.

If the governor asks the White House for federal aid, Kirk said, it is almost always rubber stamped.

"I've never heard of an area that the White House hasn't helped who has asked for help," he said.

About 20 of 30 affected homes in Gurnee's flood zone - largely on Kilbourne Road and Old Grand Avenue, north of Route 132, near what's called the village center - were evacuated through Tuesday, Village Administrator James Hayner said.

Damage estimates won't be known until after the water recedes.

Some business owners on Old Grand Avenue were still keeping a watchful eye on the floodwater, which reached a depth of 5 feet on some streets. Work also continued to prevent water from overtaking a building that houses Gurnee Elementary District 56's administrative offices and Option School on Kilbourne Road.

One historic village-owned structure on Kilbourne Road, the Mother Rudd Home, is expected to survive another flood unscathed, possibly due to "old farmer sense" used when it was built, Hayner said. The home dates to 1843 and was known as a safe haven for runaway slaves.

Meanwhile, state and local authorities are maintaining a strong presence in the flood zone. Police Chief Robert Jones said it paid dividends for one resident Monday.

Jones said Gurnee patrol officer Ron Conley saved the unidentified resident's life after her canoe tipped while she was trying to return to her flood-ravaged house. He said the incident happened near Route 132 and O'Plaine Road, where cold river water has been churning.

"(Conley) grabbed the person physically from the water and prevented her from being sucked in," Jones said.

Officials estimate 200,000 pounds of sand were used to fill 140,000 bags as of Tuesday.

A phalanx of volunteers, including teenagers and Great Lakes Naval Station sailors, spent another day filling the sandbags and performing other chores at Warren Township High School's O'Plaine Road campus. Bulldozers crawled through the water to deliver the bags.

Even if the Des Plaines River peaks today, Gurnee won't necessarily be out of the woods. National Weather Service meteorologist Bill Morris said any kind of rainfall could cause more problems.

"That's really the wild card right now, any additional rain over the next five to seven days," Morris said.

Aid: More rainfall could mean more problems.